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NEWS & EVENTS

Bandit: Help, Hope and Healing

Military service can change people. Service members may be away from family, friends and home for long periods of time. They may be at risk of injury or death. They may see comrades killed or wounded. They may have killed or wounded others, or been wounded themselves. Stress can become distress. Not all scars are visible.

Bandit understands. He endured a lot before he became a therapy dog and a comforting companion to thousands of troops at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Bandit was a rescue, a puppy-mill puppy no one wanted. He was malnourished, had a misshapen front leg, mange, and what was believed to be a large tumor on his neck that turned out to be an abscess. At 16 weeks old, he was facing imminent euthanasia.

Kelly Brownfield and David Gist of Waynesville, Missouri, had recently adopted Bandit's brother, Duke. When Brownfield looked into the doomed dog's eyes, she refused to let him be put down and adopted him too.

"I named him Bandit because he stole my heart." — Kelly Brownfield

For Brownfield, who shoulders considerable responsibilities as the director of the Fort Leonard Wood USO center, nearly every day became take-your-dog-to-work day.

"I found myself with two rambunctious Great Danes while I was working long hours at the USO," Brownfield said. "Our incredible executive director,



Bandit was invited to Arlington National Cemetery to oversee a wreath laying ceremony.

Kathy O'Connor, suggested I bring them to the USO on longer days. The troops enjoyed having puppies running around, but something funny started happening — Bandit kept disappearing. I would always find him rolled up in the lap of a soldier, a soldier who was crying, or a soldier who had lost a loved one. After several such encounters, I realized Bandit had something bigger to give to others."

Dogs can feel the energy of other beings around them. They seem to understand human emotional needs and respond appropriately. A study published in the journal "Animal Cognition" found that a dog was more likely to approach someone who was crying than someone who was humming or talking. Additionally, dogs respond to weeping with submissive behavior. Dogs seem to try to placate a person who is upset. Further, dogs will approach anyone who is upset, regardless of whether that person is their owner. Dogs have big hearts.

Bandit's heart proved to be even bigger than his imposing stature: 3 feet tall at the shoulder and 170 pounds. Having healed from his own ordeals, Bandit was now healing others. He became a certified therapy dog in 2012.

Brownfield estimates Bandit cheers about 1,500 troops every week at the USO center. He's a regular at the base hospital as well. On Wednesdays, Brownfield and Bandit visit the St. James Veterans Home. He's an official USO Comfort Dog.

Susan Hinkle, Missouri Patriot Paws coordinator and Bandit's tester at Therapy Dog, Inc., nominated Bandit for an American Humane Association Hero Dog Award for the unconditional love he shares throughout his regional community and the military community.

In 2014, the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine had the opportunity to return the care and comfort Bandit offers to so many.

"I always tell everyone Mizzou saved his life." — Kelly Brownfield

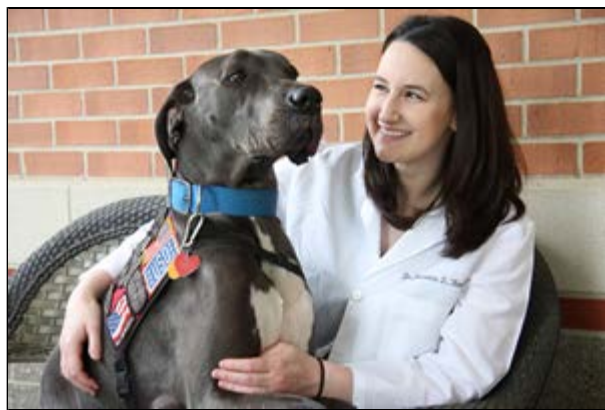
Bandit had developed a cranial cruciate ligament tear in a back leg. His veterinarian referred him to MU's Veterinary Health Center for surgery. The VHC's Small Animal Surgical Service is based in a state-of-the-art facility with exceptional resources and personnel.

"I was told Mizzou had the best program in the nation, and if anyone could help Bandit, it would be them," Brownfield related. "We went to the VHC and they immediately took him in to surgery."

VHC veterinarians performed a tibial plateau leveling osteotomy. Due to the steep slope dogs have on the tops of their knees, the surgery involved making a circular cut in the top of the shin bone — the tibial plateau. Then, the contact surface of the bone was rotated until its orientation



Bandit at Arlington.



Bandit returned to the MU Veterinary Health Center to visit Jessica Knapp, DVM, a resident in small animal surgery who helped treat the dog following a cranial cruciate ligament rupture.

was relatively level. The surgeons then stabilized Bandit's shin bone with an eight-screw plate and a 10-screw plate.

"Bandit pulled through, but recovery was rough and he had to stay at Mizzou for some time. During that period, I received a call from the VHC, informing me that Bandit had several visitors who wanted to go back and see their buddy. Some were in uniform, some were amputees," Brownfield recalled. "They told her they were there to comfort their buddy during his time of need, just as he did for them. Wounded warriors from Fort Leonard Wood had taken a van to Columbia to see Bandit, their brother."

"The incredible work of Mizzou's Veterinary Hospital Center allowed Bandit to continue to work and make a difference." – Kelly Brownfield

After two months, Bandit was back on duty, helping others through hardship. Bandit and Brownfield traveled to Washington, D.C., to visit troops at Walter Reed Military Medical Center. Bandit and Brownfield spent several days there with amputees who were learning to walk on their new prosthetic legs. Bandit walked alongside, as if to say, "Lean on me."

While in Washington, Brownfield and Bandit visited the Pentagon and USO national headquarters. They also received an invitation to the Washington offices of *National Geographic* for a photoshoot. The iconic magazine had selected Bandit as one of the world's extraordinary dogs and planned to devote a chapter in a forthcoming book to stories from wounded warriors about what the Great Dane with the great big heart meant to their recovery.

"It was a hard time, not just for Bandit or me, but for many." – Kelly Brownfield

Then, in November 2015, the cranial cruciate ligament in his other back leg ruptured. Brownfield again rushed the hero dog to MU's VHC. This time, Bandit battled several complications and barely survived. During the months of recovery, the dog's Facebook page was flooded with posts from people around the world, pulling for him, praying for him.

A letter arrived from members of an elite unit of the French National Police. Their own hero dog, Diesel, was shot and killed during the Paris terrorist attacks of November 13, 2015. With the letter was a patch. They asked that the patch be added to Bandit's therapy dog vest, to carry on Diesel's name and to symbolize hope and humanity. The letter read, in part, "When Bandit wears these colors, let him know that the many voices from France cheer for him. Let him know that he is a guiding light. Bandit, you are magnificent and a true symbol of hope."

Bandit's therapy dog vest is now festooned with so many unit patches, buttons and other symbols of appreciation, Brownfield had to get a second vest to accommodate the overflow. Among the badges is a MU College of Veterinary Medicine pin, which Brownfield says, "he will wear forever."

"I had to remember that Bandit doesn't belong to just me, he belongs to the hearts of thousands, and many were breaking as he struggled to survive," Brownfield recalled.

Bandit recovered. After dropping to less than 100 pounds, he's back to 170, a whole lot of dog on a selfless mission.

"Dogs are extraordinary creatures and do extraordinary things when given the chance." – Kelly Brownfield

The elite 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment — The Old Guard — performs a special mission. The unit provides military funeral escorts about 20 times a day at Arlington National Cemetery and guards the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. These superlative soldiers make up the Arlington Honor Guard. They were so impressed by Bandit's service, they invited him to oversee a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. He is the first dog ever granted this honor. They also asked that he work with families of the fallen, helping them cope with grief and loss.

Many nations remember the sacrifices of the fallen, the veterans and those currently serving in the military, perhaps one or two days a year. Bandit offers his special treatment to members of the military almost every day.

Brownfield has many stories of disconsolate troops and wounded warriors who say Bandit brought them light when they were lost, love when they were lonely, and hope when they believed they were hopeless.

Military Personnel Use Challenge Coins for Kudos



Bandit's challenge coin serves as a fundraiser for the USO.

Military units began using challenge coins as far back as World War I, first as a recognition tool, later as a discreet way for service members to show pride their specific unit. A challenge coin would exhibit that the holder is a member of a group that shares a bond of commitment, loyalty and dedication.

When members of the military want to show appreciation, sympathy or professional connection, they often distribute challenge coins. The coins can symbolize anything from a nod of appreciation to a deep, personal connection.

Challenge coins are not currency. They don't look like regular coins. Challenge coins are literally tokens of gratitude. They aren't flashy displays of accomplishments, they are proof of special relationships.

Bandit has his own challenge coin, which he uses to raise funds for USO Missouri. Bandit's distinctive red and gold coin features his photo and the moniker, "Bandit the Therapy Dog, Comforting Our Nation's Heroes." The coins, and more information, are available on his Facebook page.

Monument Honors Service Dogs

Dogs play a large role in the lives of soldiers and veterans. Military working dogs serve as scouts, sentries, trackers and in search-and-rescue operations. Some see duty at prison installations, others are trained to detect and locate explosives. Many military units adopt dogs as mascots. Guide dogs provide safety and companionship for wounded veterans.

Working dogs have saved thousands of American lives and continue to impact the lives of thousands of veterans. To commemorate their service, the U.S. Military Working Dog Teams National Monument was dedicated in 2013 at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

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